

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON STEPHENS.**

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In the year 1912, there was assembled at the little country town of Crawfordsville, Ga., a very distinguished company. It was made up of Judges, Congressmen, Senators, men and women high in every walk of life from Georgia and other Southern States, and Judge Lumpkin of the Supreme Court of Georgia was the orator of the day on that hot summer's morning.

Whom had these distinguished people met there to honor and why were they there on that particular date?

They were celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alexander Hamilton Stephens—one of the most distinguished statesmen of the South since the days of Washington and Jefferson. He it was who always counselled his people wisely, and though many of them held him in contempt, yet the rolling years have demonstrated that his was a mind of unusual power and foresight—a man whom people could trust and who never forsook the South though it failed to heed his warnings.

This great man was born near the town of Crawfordsville, Ga., in which he passed his life. Just a few miles to the north of him was the birthplace of Robert Toombs and just a few miles to the southeast, William L. Yancey was born—though the father of the latter lived in South Carolina, and Yancey was born there at the home of Col. Bird, his mother's father. So we see that these three men who were to figure so largely in the future of the country first saw the light in the same vicinity and within only a few years of each other. While they all differed widely in many respects, they were all three warm personal friends. Just a few years before the birth of these men, there were born in the State of Kentucky nearly due north from Crawfordsville, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis.

Mr. Stephens was a poor boy; and one good lady, his Sunday School teacher is said to have collected the funds from her wealthy lady friends to send "Little Aleck" off to school for the purpose of making a Presbyterian preacher of him. With the assistance of Mr. Mills, he was sent to a classical school at Washington, Ga., and from that point to Franklin College, at Athens, Ga., now the State University, where he graduated

with highest honors. Before he finished school he decided to study law, ultimately repaid all the money that had been advanced him for the purpose of fitting him for the ministry—thus early showing the character of the mind of Stephens—he was unwilling to enter in a course of life, when nature had fitted him for something better for himself.

After a brief course of study, he was admitted to the bar before Judge William H. Crawford—then a judge of the Superior Court of Georgia. Crawford had been a man very distinguished in the public life of the Union—United States Senator, Cabinet officer, Minister to the Court of the Great Napoleon and a formidable candidate for the Presidency in 1824. It is thought that he would have attained to this honor but for two things: his being stricken with paralysis during the campaign and the ambition of Mr. Calhoun for the place; Calhoun as an aspirant had no great pleasure in seeing Crawford the great man from the South.

Mr. Stephens soon entered the state legislature and then he went to Congress as a Whig. It will be recalled that many of the most intellectual men in the South were in this party—Toombs, Ben Hill, and for a few years during the Jackson period, Mr. Calhoun himself affiliated with this party.

It was in this place that he formed a personal friendship for Mr. Lincoln—one that lasted till the unfortunate death of the latter. Mr. Stephens always spoke in the very highest terms personally of the great Lincoln and I am sure grieved sorely when the crazy Booth fired the fatal shot. I remember reading a letter that Mr. Lincoln wrote home in 1849. He stated that he had just listened to the finest speech that had ever greeted his ears—that it was delivered by a little consumptive man from Georgia by the name of Stephens—and that his old eyes were not dry yet.

Mr. Stephens will live longest by his fight against secession and on this his fame will rest.

I may say right here there was a large body of men in the South opposed to secession as an expedient, while they believed in the right yet they did not think the right ought to be exercised at that time. Also it is stated on good authority that

Robert E. Lee was opposed to secession and only went out when his state seceded—the Lee family being one of the most illustrious in Virginia and from Lee's point of view a Lee could not draw his sword against Virginia.

Mr. Stephens made two speeches against secession—one in the Georgia Legislature and the other before the secession convention. I quote from the first speech which I think the better of the two—though both are fine: "The organization of society has much to do with the development of the natural resources of any country or any land. The institutions of a people, political and moral are the matrix in which the germ of their organic structure quickens into life, takes root and develops in form, nature and character. \* \* \* Look at Greece! There is the same fertile soil, the same blue sky, the same inlets and harbors, the same Aegean, the same Olympus—there is the same land where Homer sang where Pericles spoke—it is in nature the same old Greece; but it is living Greece no more! Descendants of the same people inhabit the country; yet what is the reason of this mighty difference. In the midst of present degradation, we see the glorious fragments of the ancient works of art—temples with ornaments and inscriptions that excite wonder and admiration, the remains of a once high order of civilization, which have outlived the language they spoke. Upon them all Ichabod is written—their glory has departed. Why is this so? I answer, their institutions have been destroyed, \* \* \* And, my countrymen, if we shall in an evil hour rashly pull down and destroy these institutions, which the patriotic hands of our fathers labored so long and so hard to build up, and which have done so much for us and for the world, who can venture the prediction that similar results will not ensue? Let us avoid them if we can." Mr. Stephens went on to show that the State of Georgia had great material prosperity and that all around the State were evidences of happiness and thrift. He begged his hearers to desist before turning the feet of the invader that way. How prophetic were his words! Any man who reads that speech in the light of past events must conclude that he was a seer and a prophet and statesman combined. This was the greatest speech delivered in connection with the conflict

between the states. It has the ring of truth, greatness and sincerity in every period. It is eloquent, persuasive. I do not think all things considered, greater effort has been made on the American continent.

We know that he followed his State out of the Union and when the Confederate Government was organized, that he was the Vice-President. He and Mr. Davis, the President did not harmonize. Most of the activities of Mr. Stephens were directed to helping the sick and wounded; and doing what he could to assist in individual cases.

After the surrender, he with Herschel V. Johnson was elected to the U. S. Senate but they were not allowed to take their seats. They were elected for the reason that these two had made the hardest fight against secession and that these, if any man from Georgia had a chance, would be acceptable to the powers in Washington, but even they were turned back. In the early 70's he was elected to Congress from his old district and served there till 1882, when he was elected governor of his native state.

While in Congress, Mr. Stephens was distressingly afflicted and had to be carried into the hall in a roller chair. But he had great influence there. The brave men from the North realized that this pathetic little figure helpless in the chair was a victim of circumstances—that he was a martyr to fate and to the love he bore his people everywhere. They remembered the cruel days spent in prison at Fort Warren, a vicarious sacrifice to the sins of others. The speaker of the House was always willing to recognize him and his feeble voice lifted on some subject reminded them that its shrill tenor had warned the people of his beloved South to stay in the Union and not to commit this act of “gross madness and great wickedness,” as he called secession. But we can be thankful that he has come into his own at last. His old home is now a shrine to which men from all parts of America turn as a sacred place. The noble women of Georgia have erected a life-size statue near his grave in front of his old home and there the Great Commoner stands in the attitude of speech—a benediction on his native State and the Union. His home kept up by their loving hands will be a Mecca

for Statesmen from all parts of the globe. Mr. Thos. E. Watson says, "His intellect was like a mountain and his spotless character covered it with eternal snows." His was the voice of caution and candor but it fell on unheeding ears. He was of the common people and he fought their battles. He lives also in the two hundred and more men and women whom he assisted in getting an education and pointing them to "where Fame's proud temple shines afar." He lives in the memories of the naked that he clothed and the hungry that he fed. He literally gave away over one hundred thousand dollars in his life time to clothe the naked and feed the hungry. To quote Mr. Watson again: "When he died all that he left was a modest house in a country town and that was all. His faithful servant Harry, who sleeps near him, though an ex-slave, was richer than his master when he died." These two, Mr. Stephens and faithful Harry, who so long looked after his invalid master will live in the affections of the people of the South. To-day they sleep on a hillside not far apart, both awaiting the general resurrection of the just. What more beautiful picture can we have than that—they were faithful in life and in death they were not divided?

No man ever had the affections of the people of Georgia—aye, of the whole South, as did "Little Aleck", as he was affectionately called. Always kind, gentle and considerate, he was loved and loving. It has been said that he and John Randolph, of Roanoke, were similar in many ways save in this—that no one loved the great Virginia orator while everybody loved Mr. Stephens. He stands as a beacon light to the ages yet to come pointing them to deeds of good citizenship, to love, charity and high standards; he lived in touch with eternity all the time and death was never away from his doorsteps; he was an exemplar of the ruler who guides his people with justice and judges them with equity. He is a part of the ages and his fame is secure.

C. J. RAMAGE.

*Saluda, S. C.*